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Neighbors get sneak peek of ape house

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Dorothy Halliburton had driven past the massive construction site of the great ape research facility near her southeast Des Moines home and was curious to see what's inside.

Tuesday night, Halliburton and about 100 of her neighbors got a sneak preview.

Officials of the Great Ape Trust of Iowa opened the gates to the 200-acre primate center Tuesday, giving nearby residents the first peek at progress made at the site.

"This is just great. Remarkable, really," Halliburton, who brought her grandkids, said after walking through the nearly completed orangutan center. "We're looking forward to coming again."

The first phase of the \$10 million sanctuary has been largely paid for by Des Moines businessman Ted Townsend and the foundation he established. Des Moines donated 137 acres of the land for the sanctuary, which is in the 4200 block of East Brooks Drive.

The first apes - brother and sister orangutans Azy, 26, and Indah, 23 - are expected to arrive in September from the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

The orangutan building is expected to be completed in about three weeks, said Robert Shumaker, director of orangutan research. It will be heated in the winter and air-conditioned in the summer, and the orangutans - who spend most of their



MARY CHIND/REGISTER PHOTOS

Preview: Some residents on Tuesday got to look inside the Great Ape Trust of Iowa being built on the southeast side of Des Moines. The first apes are expected to arrive in September from the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

time off the ground - will crawl climbing structures among three stories while looking out thick glass windows to a view of trees and a lake.

After that, bonobos from Georgia State University's Language Research Center will arrive. Gorillas and chimpanzees, the world's other two great apes, will come later, as their facilities are completed.

It will be one of the few research facilities in the world that will house all four types of great apes, said Caisie Pitman, a research assistant. It won't be open to the public, but small groups will be able to arrange visits.

The researchers who will work with the apes showed visitors the bonobo and orangutan facilities Tuesday, and people stepped into the actual living spaces for apes that the public will never be able to walk through again.

"There is so much interest with this," Shumaker said. "People are very appreciative that we're keeping them informed."

Buses shuttled two dozen people at a time to the research center. It was the third such event for neighbors, but the first time people got to see something other than dirt and blueprints.

Jane Johnson has been following the progress of the center for years and was thrilled to step inside.

"I think this is going to be a wonderful facility for Des Moines," she said.